



FROM ALIENATION TO COMMUNITY: ARUN JOSHI'S THE FOREIGNER

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INTRODUCTION

Arun Joshi came into limelight with the publication of his very first novel The Foreigner, which appeared in 1968. The Foreigner is thematically based on the lower depths of human sufferings. The protagonist, Sindi Oberoi is a product of social situation of the West and the East, who lives in a socio-psychological dilemma. He suffers from psychological insecurity. This novel is considered as One of the most compelling existentialist works of Indian English Fiction.

It is inspired by Albert Camus's well known novel *The Outsider*. It also remains Raja Rao's The Serpent and The Rope and Kamala Markenday's The Nowhere Man. The novel deals with Cross Cultures and East West encounter. The formative part of the novel develops in the backdrop of the west and the later part culminates in India. Joshi acknowledges that the novel is a study in alienation and is based on observation and personal experience. He admits that it is autobiographical as he himself puts it : "Some parts of The Foreigner, my first book, were written when I was a student in America. I gave it up then and completed it later in 1966." (The Foreigner - Introduction P-2)

And after two years in 1968 it was first published by Hind Pocket Books, Delhi. It narrates the story of Sindi Oberoi who is the representative of Arun Joshi himself at many places. The novel enacts the crisis of the present in the story of Sindi Oberoi, the protagonist who is thoroughly an existentialist character rootless restless.

Arun Joshi's maiden novel The Foreigner reflects an Individual's quest for identity crisis in the modern world. It reflects the Indian ethos, the teachings of Indian Philosophy which is hidden in The Bhagvad Gita and the traces of western thoughts and ideology. This novel also traces the autobiographical impact of Joshi as he speaks out his beliefs, ideas and experiences of life through Sindi. Arun Joshi himself had his education abroad, but he doesnot fully approve the western way of life and the western values. The Foreigner is a clear example of his rejection of these values. Arun Joshi concentrated on the depiction of the interior of individual psyche, the outer journey leading to the inner depths of soul.

The Foreigner the seminal work of Arun Joshi depicts the quest for identity of its protagonist Sindi Oberoi, known as 'Sindi' in the novel throughout. It has been remarked. "A strange feeling of aloneness and aloofness... permeates the entire narrative and provides the necessary texture and structure to the novel" (O. P.

Bhatnagar, "Arun Joshi's The Foreigner A Critique of East and West, "The Journal of Indian writing in English, (July 1973), PP 13-14) In her review of the novel, Meenakshi Mukharjee describes the hero as "a perennial outsider." P- 101 Quest 60, (January-March 1969) Sindi is always lonely and alien in the world wherever he moves. He belongs to no country, no people and regards himself as "an uprooted young man living in the latter half of the twentieth century." (The Foreigner -195))

Born in Kenya of an Indian father and a British Mother, both of whom died in his infancy, Sindi is brought up by his uncle who too leaves him soon after his death. He receives his education in East Africa, London and America. Devoid of parental love, familial bonds and cultural roots, Sindi grows up as a rootless young man with a built in fissure in his personality. Dislocated as he is, his only feeling of himself is of an alien as he says : "My foreigners lie within me and I could not leave myself behind wherever I went." (The Foreigner-61) The little sense of security, which he has when his uncle is alive, is totally shattered after his death. His experiences of living in Kenya, London and Boston further deepen his feeling of insecurity. He feels restless in Kenya and even contemplates suicide. He immigrates to London but there also he finds his life dull and meaningless. He invariably holds discussion with a Catholic priest to find a clue to the mystery of his existence. In the absence of a firm sense of identity, he tries to define it by developing intimacy with two young women Anna and Kathy. Their company and friendship enlivens his personality for sometime but soon he comes back to his previous sense of loss of belongingness as two of them departs from him for one or the other reason. He experiences pleasure and pain which make him acutely conscious of the fact that "all love... was illusion and all pain sprang from this illusion" (The Foreigner 170) Sindi realizes that self involvement is the root cause of his emotional problems and the feeling of alienation and by adopting an attitude of detachment, he can better meet the challenges of life.

Despite the death struggle of his soul to practice detachment, Sindi gets involved with a beautiful and benign American girl June. His involvement with her is very baffling for it does not resolve his predicament of loneliness. His loneliness is apparent to anyone who meets and talks to him:

There is something strange about you, you know. Something distant. I'd guess that when people are with you they don't feel like they're with a human being. Maybe it's an Indian characteristic, but I have a feeling

you'd be a foreigner everywhere. (*The Foreigner*-33)

Sindi is trapped in his own loneliness, which is accentuated by his withdrawal from the society around him. He wonders :

In what way, if any did I belong to the world that roared beneath my apartment window, somebody had begotten me without a purpose, and so far I had lived without a purpose. Perhaps I felt like that because I was a foreigner in America. But then, what difference would it have made if I had lived in Kenya or India or any other. (*The Foreigner* 55)

The in-depth insecurity of his soul prohibits him to marry June as the experiences of the departure of all his near and dear ones starting from his parents, and uncle to Anna and Cathy has shattered the inner strata of his personality. He tells June : "Marriage would not help June. We are alone, both you and I. " But when June leaves him, he feels miserable and insecure. The emptiness that surrounds him leaves him shocked. Sindi is sad to think that he has wasted twenty five years "in the search of peace" (*The Foreigner* 92) and aimlessly wandered from this place to that to satisfy his alien soul.

After Babu's and June's death, Sindi decides to come to India hoping that it will provide him "a place to anchor on this lonely planet." (*The Foreigner* 76) But here too, he is faced with a different problem. While in Britain and America, Sindi is Kenya born Indian, in India he is treated as an outsider. He fails to establish any bond with the people of India. Thus his last attempt to strike his roots in India ends in dismal failure. Drifting aimlessly from country to country Sindi fails to affiliate himself to any country, culture or community as "his alienation is of the soul and not of geography." [Arun Joshi, "Introduction" *The Foreigner*.] Sindi himself confides, his "foreignness" lies "within" him and drives him from crisis to crisis rendering it difficult for him to leave "himself" behind wherever he goes. (*The Foreigner* 61)

The moment at which an individual questions the very foundations of his life and seeks the answer to the questions like whether his life has any meaning, purpose or value is the central point to all existential crises. Sindi's rootlessness is a consequence of the cumulative forces, his inter racial parentage, his personal experiences abroad and in India. His is a problem of existence, seeking fulfillment in terms of human relationships. He lacked love and affection from his very childhood and this background develops in him a sense of insecurity and impermanence of relations. Sindi Oberoi's life is a study in rootlessness. He is hardly Indian and this fact keeps on haunting him. He is a child of mixed parentage. Being a product of a hybrid culture and his education in Kenya London, Boston and New York, cut him from his racial roots. As he grows older he is haunted by the gnawing sense of his rootlessness. He is always aware of the fact that he belongs to no culture and cannot confidently call himself either a Kenyan or an Indian.

The crisis of identity in the major characters of *The Foreigner*

has been explored at various levels such as the cross-cultural, racial, national, international, individual, interpersonal, industrial and business relationships. The crisis of the present that has been projected in the novel is not only faced by the Sindi Oberoi but also by the other characters who came in his contact. The crisis of identity dealt with in *The Foreigner* is mainly at the socio-psychological level. Sindi Oberoi is always faced with the crisis of his identity and quest for a solution which he gets in the end at the suggestion given to him by a low paid employee, Muthu, of the firm. The strain of lost childhood is the main cause of Sindi's deep sense of his crisis of identity. He feels a kind of rootlessness because of the fact that his hybrid birth did not place him anywhere. He did not receive the love of English mother and Kenyan Indian father beyond the age of four when he hardly knew them and remembered them only through "a couple of wrinkled and cracked photographs." Sindi's life under his uncle in Kenya and his schooling there followed by his further studies in England and lastly in America made him all the more distanced from his roots, identity and a meaningful quest of life.

Sindi's crisis of identity rests in his soul. He feels himself a foreigner in Kenya, London, Boston and New Delhi. His American girlfriend, June Blyth, is the first one to point out to him of his being obsessed with the foreign complex:

In New Delhi also he is no different Sheila tells him frankly "you are still a foreigner. You don't belong here." *The Foreigner* -25 When Babu in America accuses him of his ignorance of Hindu family in that "he was a perfect example of an Indian who pretended to be a foreigner and behaved as one" (26) Even Sindi hesitates in calling himself a Hindu. When June Blyth asks him whether as a Hindu he believes in God, He replies: Anyway I can't really be called a Hindu. My mother was English and my father I am told, a septic. That does not seem like a good beginning for a Hindu. Does it?

Sindi considers life just meaningless and to be a wasted one. He thinks:

My fifth Christmas on these alien shores. And yet all shores are alien when you don't belong anywhere Twenty-fifth Christmas on this planet. Twenty-five years largely wasted in search of wrong things in wrong places. Twenty five years gone in search of piece and what did I have to show for achievement" (*The Foreigner* 30)

He even speaks of his shocking absurdity of existence:

Somebody had begotten me without a purpose and so far I lived without a purpose. Perhaps I felt like because I was a foreigner in America. But then what difference could it have made for that matter? It seemed to me that I would still be a foreigner. My foreignness lay within me and I could not leave myself behind wherever I went. (*The Foreigner* 31)

He expresses his angst of rootlessness to Mr. Khemka:

You had a clear-cut system of morality, a caste system

that laid down all you had to do. You had a God-you had roots in the soil you lived upon. Look at me. I have no roots. I have no system of morality. What does it mean to me if you call me an immoral man..... I don't even have a reason to live. (*The Foreigner* 32)

Sindi is fed up with "the randomness of existence"(38) and does not accept the offer of a job at MIT. He wants to go back to Nigeria or India which also is decided by "the flip of coin" (39). "Head for Nigeria, I said. The coin showed tails. New Delhi." 40 It is this which changes the course of his life and he comes first to New Delhi, the land from where his forefathers had settled in Kenya.

The environment in which an individual lives has an important bearing upon his different psychological characteristics and behavioral patterns. It is the type of environment with his stimulating, unstimulating characteristics that play vital role in shaping of one's behavior. One's identity is his source of power or inspiration he derives by affiliating himself to a group, community, nation etc. His psychological needs are fulfilled to a great extent and allows him to assert as an individual in his group or community. Sindi's acceptance of Muthu's request to help them, bearing the responsibility of the firm for their sake, is the example of his strong sense of affiliation towards them, being a good hearted part of the community. It causes him to know himself in a new perspective strongly affirming his role in society and linking self to be identified with the needy ones. He cultivates a sense of detachment to overcome his painful memories of the past. He wants to avert the tragedy of June and Babu when he feels his responsibility and involvement in it. He soon realizes his sense of detachment and objectivity when he finds values in life.

He learns that detachment consisted of right action and not escape from it. When he overcomes this crisis, he decides to come over to India and here he feels affection for life vanities and morality.

This thinking of Sindi, Oberoi reaches the depths of human problem of socio cultural existence. The world 'foreigner' finds a symbolical value of the larger context of human existence. Sindi is a foreigner but he knows the reality of life in America. The superficiality, the meaninglessness and his emotional breath throughout combines experience of his journey from one country to another.

Sindi, June and Babu have different roots and all of them are trying for existence in others culture. Babu has his roots in Indian soil but wings in America. He loves June, decides to marry her but his conventional morality comes in the way when he discovers that she is in love with others also but he can't resist his temptation for her. He tries to forget his roots and wants to destroy the process of changes that may occur. He gives June all she needs but she is also in a reckless condition. She dangles between Babu and Sindi. The philosophy of detachment does not suit her. She pleads her case with Sindi :

"I has wanted to belong to you but you did not want it. You are

so self sufficient there is hardly any place for me in your life except perhaps as a mistress. Babu on the other hand, was on the edge of a breakdown al still is for that matter. He loves me more than he loves himself that's more than what can be said for you. In return I am prepared to give him all that I have . (158)

When Babu comes to know that Sindi is in love with Juner without lust or passion but simply to help her find herself, he decides to kill himself. This false detachment of Sindi drives him to death. He is destroyed in the strange ways of the western culture. After his death June also dies. Her death symbolizes cultural lag. The two cultures of East and West hardly meet.

In comparison in June, Babu is a simple character having Indian roots and middle class values while June is rooted in totally different foreign culture. Sindi feels a sense of guilt and self contradiction. He feels like an insecure man and harbours a deep rooted feeling of unreality. He wants to justify his identity through his contacts with others and loses both individuality and identity. His relationship with Anna, Kathy and June fails as he can not make out a complete union in any case.

Sindi is pre occupied with the sense of possession of a girl like June. While he tries to preserve his identity he is terrified with the fear of being possessed. He fears to be united in marriage because he sees his existence doomed. He works on the theory that "One should be able to love without wanting to possess."

"All love whether of things, or persons or one self was illusion and all pain sprang from this illusion. Love begot greed and attachment, and it led to possession. Absence of love does not mean hatred. Hatred is just another from of love. There is another way of loving. You can love without attachment. without desire. You can love without attachment to the objects of your love. " (*The Foreigner* - 170)

In between attachment and detachment, Sindi finally understands that detachment does not mean an escape or an alienation it means involvement, devotion and sacrifice. He surrenders to himself as an existential hero and settles with the business with Sheila and with himself. The novel explores Sindi's quest from alienation to community finding final destination in spirituality and service to society.

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